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8 MAY 1981

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MEMORANDUM TO: PA - Mr. William Dyess

FROM: CA - Diego C. Asencio

SUBJECT: Official Statement Regarding the Disappearance of American Citizen John J. Sullivan in El Salvador

John J. Sullivan, a 26 year old American free lance journalist, disappeared mysteriously from the Hotel San Salvador Sheraton at San Salvador the evening of Sunday, December 28, 1980, only a few hours after his arrival in El Salvador to write a political article for "Hustler" magazine. In spite of considerable efforts on the part of our Embassy, the Salvadoran authorities, and this Bureau, no further trace of John Sullivan has been found. The circumstances of his disappearance remains a mystery.

His immediate family here in the U.S. (father, mother and two married sisters) are understandably distraught over his disappearance, and unfortunately do not believe that the Department and the Embassy are taking all possible steps to locate him. Although we have done and will continue to do our best to reassure them on this score, one issue which consistently arises, including in a personal meeting I had with the Sullivan family in late February and more recently in a letter I received from the father, is that the family believes the Department should make a public statement regarding John's disappearance. Although I agree a public statement will not necessarily help locate John Sullivan or shed some light on his disappearance, it will obviously reassure the family that the U.S. Government is concerned over the disappearance and is taking every possible step to locate him.

Failing this, the family has already stated they will make their own trip to El Salvador which I am sure will be given heavy media coverage. They have also expressed to us a plan to take out a full page ad in the "New York Daily News" (the father's employer) which would condemn the Department for what they perceive as a lack of interest

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in John's disappearance. I believe a public statement acknowledging John's disappearance and the Department's concern, if given adequate coverage, will at least answer some of the family's complaints.

I am attaching a suggested formal statement concerning John Sullivan's disappearance, and recommend that the Department's concern be volunteered by the Spokesman at the noon briefing either Thursday, March 26, or Friday, March 27.

I also request that at any press conferences dealing with El Salvador, if the opportunity presents itself, the Department volunteer its awareness of and concern for the fact that news reporter John Sullivan disappeared under mysterious circumstances in San Salvador on December 28, 1980. Such a statement would be particularly relevant in answers to questions regarding the murder of the four American women or the two American AIFLD representatives.

Attachment:
Press Statement on John J. Sullivan, El Salvador.

cc: ARA - Amb. Thomas O. Enders

CA/OCS/EMR-JLWard:rgr
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CA/OCS-LPGoelz
CA-REFritts

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CA PRESS GUIDANCE March 27, 1981

CONTINUED DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN SULLIVAN

Q. Why is the Department making a statement about Mr. Sullivan at this time?

A. It will be three months this weekend since the disappearance of Mr. Sullivan. We wish to underline the fact that the Department and our Embassy in San Salvador are making every effort to locate Mr. Sullivan and that we share the concern of his family.

Q. Do we have any information on Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts?

A. Unfortunately, we do not. We know that Mr. Sullivan checked into the Sheraton Hotel on December 28 and has not been seen since. His personal affects were left in his hotel room.

Q. How did you discover that he was missing?

A. Our Embassy in San Salvador was notified by the hotel. The Embassy immediately contacted the Department and requested that Mr. Sullivan's family be informed and that they provide further information to assist in the search. A Department officer first spoke with Mr. Sullivan's mother on January 6.

Q. Had there been any contact between Mr. Sullivan and Embassy personnel prior to his disappearance?

A. Not to my knowledge.

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Q. What is currently being done to search for Mr. Sullivan?

A. We have discussed Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts with Salvadorian authorities on numerous occasions. Additionally, the Embassy has made inquiries of its own with persons who might have information leading to the location of Mr. Sullivan. Inquiries have been made at hospitals, clinics, detention centers in San Salvador, and with long-time American residents of El Salvador. The Salvadorian Government has also made extensive inquiries. In addition, the Embassy has arranged for public and radio and television announcements in an attempt to gain information on Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts. Also, all U.S. military and civilian personnel stationed in El Salvador have been provided information about Mr. Sullivan, including his photograph. They, as well as all personnel as they are assigned to El Salvador, are briefed on Mr. Sullivan's disappearance and are on the lookout for him.

CA/PA:CJFox:tf
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Clearances:
CA - R Fritts
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